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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the features of nonstandard English spoken on television during the hours when children are most likely to be watching. A grammatical analysis of the speech of 150 television characters revealed that, in general, television presented a homogenized version of nonstandard English. The relative frequency of usage of nonstandard English was highest among males and blacks, depending on the role they portrayed. Although black characters were found to have the highest incidence of variants per person on television, their speech contained few features characteristic to black English, as described by Labov and Burling. The results suggest that nonstandard English may essentially be a device used for stereotyping television characters into categories of the power assertive, the comedian, and/or the victim. (References, tables and figures are appended.) (Author/SRT)

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NONSTANDARD ENGLISH ON TELEVISION

A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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NONSTANDARD ENGLISH ON TELEVISION
A Content Analysis

Abstract

This investigation analyzes features of nonstandard English spoken on television during the hours when children are most likely to be watching. A grammatical analysis of the speech of 150 TV characters revealed that, in general, the relative frequency of usage of nonstandard English was highest among males and blacks, depending on the role they portrayed. Although black characters were found to have the highest incidence of variants per person on television, their speech contained few features characteristic to Black English, as described by Labov (1972 & 1975), Burling (1973) and others. The results suggest that nonstandard English may essentially be a device used for stereotyping television characters into categories of the power assertive, the comedian, and/or the victim. Continued study of the language on television may increase our understanding of television's impact on viewer attention, comprehension, perceptions and perhaps on viewer attitudes and subsequent behaviors.

NONSTANDARD ENGLISH ON TELEVISION - A CONTENT ANALYSIS

Although interest in social portrayals on television has mushroomed over the past 20 years, most of the research has emphasized the visual aspects of these representations. Studies of the portrayals of sex roles, (e.g., Seggar, Hafen, & Hannonen-Gladden, 1981), character occupations, (e.g., DeFleur, 1964) and racial stereotyping (e.g., Mendelson and Young, 1972; Roberts, 1970-71), for example, all rely on the ways in which characters are presented visually. Curiously, relatively little attention has been directed to analyzing the language spoken by characters on television.

Only recently have investigators begun to examine the auditory dimension of televiewing. Several studies have analyzed the complexity of vocabulary and sentence structure heard on television. Liberman (1983, p. 604) found that children encounter a more limited set of words on television than they would in live conversations. "Very likely, the lexicon of TV programming is under 5,000 words. Children enter school with a lexicon about that large." Fasick (1973) compared the language on three children's television shows with that of five picture books and found that the television shows generally offered less diverse and complex language than did the books.

More recently, Rice (1984) analyzed the dialogue of six children's television programs in terms of communicative flow, language structures and meaning/content. She was interested in seeing how the dialogue characteristics compared to parental modifications of speech which have been shown to facilitate linguistic comprehension of preschool children, such as the shortening of sentences, repetition and the use of simple unambiguous vocabulary. Rice found that many of the linguistic features

of the programs were strikingly similar to the adjustments made by mothers when talking with their young children. The rate of speech (words per minute) of some shows, for instance, corresponded to that rate found to be prevalent with mothers telling stories to their 21-month-old children.

In another study, McCorkle (1980) investigated the language environment on selected Saturday morning cartoons. She did not analyze the grammatical or linguistic structures of sentences. Instead, she analyzed speech acts. Using "Categories of Valued Interpersonal Response," a tool for classifying verbal utterances, McCorkle categorized responses heard on five hours of cartoons into categories of supportiveness (e.g., comments of encouragements), defensiveness (e.g., comments justifying one's own opinions) and neutrality. Her findings included observations that females used more supportive language than did males and that black adults were among those least likely to utter a supportive comment. Overall, the results suggested that language on cartoons may be presenting predictable stereotypical patterns.

The final studies that investigated language on television were concerned with the role of blacks and Black English. Two studies led by Fine and Anderson (1979; 1980) performed syntactic analyses of the language of black characters on black situation comedies. "Dialogue is an essential part of television characterizations and therefore, some attention to language is not only justified, but required, in a comprehensive description (of televised portrayals)" (1979, p. 22). After studying the language of six black comedy shows, the researchers confirmed their hypothesis that "television presents a homogenized version of Black English" (p. 25). They found that among black

characters, women were the keepers of the standard language, using Black English half as often as men. The black characters who used Black English most frequently included those of low status occupations and those with flamboyant personal styles and strong racial identity (e.g., Willona of "Good Times"). The authors concluded that the frequent use of Black English served to emphasize a character's isolation from the mainstream culture.

In a more recent study, Anderson, Fine and Johnson (1983) analyzed the effects of Black English on the appeal of the televised characters of "Roots II." "Although the results are mixed, subjects (33 middle to upper class undergraduates, 32 of whom were white and one of whom was chicana) were generally more likely to both identify with and admire speakers of Standard English rather than of BEV (Black English Vernacular)" (p. 190). However, these investigators also found that no judgments were made explicitly on the basis of language. It appeared that most of the admirable roles were played by speakers of Standard English, for example Alex Hailey. Therefore, it was difficult to isolate the effects of the role from that of the language.

In sum, the research that analyzes the language on television addresses the issue from diverse perspectives. The findings, however, indicate that the language of television is not highly complex or linguistically diverse and sometimes approaches the level of parent-baby talk. The language on television has been found to foster stereotypes and to present models of predictable verbal interaction. Variations from the standard language, as evidenced by Black English, have not been presented in their linguistic richness but rather have been limited to a few verbal examples and used to stereotype. The effects of these

televised language patterns on young viewers are yet to be fully understood.

The following study of the language of 150 television characters was designed as an investigation into the use of grammatical variants on television. Motivated by a pilot study (Holland, 1984), this research was intended to address the following questions:

1) What types of language are children exposed to on television?

2) Do males and females differ in their use of nonstandard English?

3) Do black characters and white characters differ in their use of nonstandard English?

4) Do black characters on television speak Black English?

5) Does the style of language reflect, imply or help to create particular stereotypes of individuals?

To the extent that several programs were selected specifically in order to address these questions, caution must be taken when comparing program categories and the conclusions may only be suggestive. Nevertheless, discernable patterns were observed which raised additional questions and concerns for further investigation. Future replication and analysis will be needed to determine the full extent to which the findings are significant.

METHOD

Sample:

The study was designed as a content analysis. Thirty shows were selected from the following four categories: 1) Saturday morning, 2) Educational programs, 3) "Black Programs" and 4) Prime Time. The rationale was to select a range of show genres from that which was available during the hours when children are most likely to be watching.

Eight Saturday morning programs were included. For data consistency, selection was limited to those with dialogue that continued throughout an entire half-hour segment. These eight shows represented all the available programs in that category that met this requirement. The programs included: "Mr. T," "Mighty Orbots," "Muppet Babies," and "Dragon's Lair." Four shows were selected from educational programming. Since there are little data to indicate that children from all age groups watch general educational programming with great consistency, I selected those programs that have existed for the longest period of time and have become standards in the field. They were "Electric Company," "Sesame Street," "Mr. Rogers," and "3-2-1 Contact."

A substantial concern of this study was to analyze the nonstandard English used on television in terms of Black English. Given the importance of the claim that 80% of the blacks in America have been estimated to speak Black English (Dillard, 1972), all Prime Time programs with regular starring roles portrayed by blacks were included in the study. The 7 programs in this category were: "Cosby Show," "Jeffersons," "Miami Vice," "Benson," "Different Strokes," "Webster," and "Gimme A Break."

Research has also shown that children watch a great deal of adult programming (Himmelweit, Oppenheim, & Vince, 1958; Moody, 1980; Schramm, Lyle, & Parker, 1961;). Therefore, 11 additional shows were selected at random from the available programming on the three major networks seven days a week with starting times between 8:00 and 10:00 P.M. The shows included "St. Elsewhere," "Facts of Life," "A Team" and "Cagney and Lacey."

Analysis:

All 30 shows were recorded on tape by means of a video cassette recorder. A content analysis was done for each show. Five characters from each program were selected on the basis that they were the five characters most central to the plot. Their occupational portrayal, age, sex, and ethnicity were classified. In addition, their speech was analyzed for incidents of nonstandard English, which were transcribed verbatim. The purpose of the analysis was to identify any recurring patterns of language usage in relationship to the variables of sex, character role, occupational portrayal and ethnicity.

The basic criteria were defined as follows:

1. Occupational portrayal - the job or main activity of the character. The occupations included professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers, and state officials), managers (e.g., small business owners), domestic employees (e.g., housekeepers, nannies), homemakers, the illegally employed, royalty (e.g., kings, princesses, knights), law enforcers (e.g., policemen, detectives, and intelligence agents), the unemployed and students. If no occupation was discernable then the character was classified under "employment undefined."

2. Age - classified as (a) under 18 years, (b) between 18 and 65 years and (c) over 65 years. The ages of the nonhuman characters were often undiscernable. Age, sex, and ethnicity are included with occupational portrayal in Table 1.

3. Sex - defined by physical attributes for human beings but by pitch of voice and style of dress for nonhuman beings. Nonhuman characters with high voices were deemed to be female and those with voices that were low were considered to be male.

4. Ethnicity - categorized as Caucasian, Black, Asian and Hispanic and Native American. Each human character could be identified as belonging primarily to one of these ethnic affiliations, except for the Native American. (There were no characters of Native American ethnicity in this sample of programs.)

5. Character Role - defined as the theatrical role of the individual as it related to the plot of the program. The roles included villains (those who deliberately caused problems for the innocent), victims (those who were innocently hurt through crime or circumstance), heroes (those who came to the aid of others even when their own well being was endangered), and comedians, (those who inspired more than the average number of laughs per character on a show with a laugh track or a live audience). Along with these roles, one character trait, individual power assertiveness, proved to be of particular interest. In order to define this trait, Martin Hoffman's definition of power assertion was applied. A power assertive character was one who used "physical punishment, deprivation of material objects or privileges, the direct application of force or the threat of any of these" towards others (Hoffman, 1970, 285).

Nonstandard English was defined as any sentence or use of words, excluding slang, that did not conform to either the standard rules of prescriptive grammar as discussed in Warriner's series of grammar handbooks or else the rules of usage as cited in the Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1984). Also included was language that exhibited features of Black English and nonmiddle class conversational English, such as "she be working," and "he don't know nothing". Deviant

pronunciation such as "goin'" was not considered to be an incidence of nonstandard English. Sources for nonstandard features included works by Labov (1975), Burling (1973), Dillard (1972), Dale (1972), and a consultation with Carol Chomsky (May, 1985). In addition, slang was defined as any word or phrase cited as being slang in the Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English (Partridge, 1984) or in consultation with linguists and/or other native speakers.

Many incomplete sentences were considered to be conversational and therefore were not counted among the variants. This was especially prevalent when the omitted portions of the sentences were clearly contained within the statements by someone else either following or preceding the incomplete sentence. In addition, fragments which were answers, warnings, corrections, elaborations, social greetings and exclamations were not included among the grammatical variants. For example, one answer to a question was the word, "Right". This was not considered to be an example of nonstandard usage.

Each program was reviewed twice and 25% of the programs were watched by an independent co-viewer. All instances of nonstandard English were transcribed in their entirety with notes as to their context. In checking reliability, the percentage agreement between viewers was 89%. Discrepancies resulted from the omission of examples rather than the classification of the deviations. The main problem was the difficulty of focussing on syntax to the exclusion of meaning. However, an additional review of the tapes, followed by a discussion, resolved these discrepancies and agreement was reached on all variations.

Actual scripts of the program would have permitted a comparison between the total number of variants and total words spoken by each character. This would also have allowed a comparison between the language that was actually heard on the air and that which was scripted.[1] Since scripts were not available, the findings may be used to characterize only the aired material without reference to scripts and/or script writers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results:

Basically, the language on television was found to be Standard English. However, during 15 hours of viewing time, 587 grammatical variants were recorded, averaging nearly 40 per hour. These were classified into nineteen categories which included the deletion and nonstandard use of auxiliary verbs, the deletion of nouns, main verbs, articles and conditionals, the use of ain't, and double negatives. The complete list of categories is presented in Figure 1.

In total, three of the 19 categories accounted for 67% of all variants. The most frequently used category was the deletion or nonstandard use of the auxiliary verb, e.g., "I got a right to be protected." This category was favored by white characters and black characters alike and accounted for 34% of all variants spoken on television. With the addition of two more categories, the deletion of subjects and objects and the deletion of main verbs, 67% of all the variants could be classified. This meant that three categories of

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[1]Fine and Anderson (1980) conducted such a comparison and found that black actors did interject "a significant percentage" (59%) of non-scripted Black English variants especially in moments of emphasis and emotion.

nonstandard English accounted for more than two-thirds of all variants heard on television, leaving the other one-third widely distributed among 16 different classifications. (See Figure 2 and Tables 2, 3,and 4).

Men used more nonstandard features than women. Men accounted for 78% of the total variants (N=587) and women, 22%. The same sex differences in variant usage held for the black characters as well. On the basis of show genre, females consistently accounted for fewer than 28% of the variants. However, an exception to this pattern of female/male difference appeared on educational programming where females accounted for almost two-thirds of the variants, reversing the otherwise uniform trend. Nonetheless, in general, women were portrayed as the keepers of the standard form. This supports findings by Kramarae (1982) in her studies of female discourse in real-life and by Fine and Anderson (1980) in their analysis of television dialogue.

Three-fourths of all the speakers in this sample used at least one feature of nonstandard English within one-half hour of programming. When the data were analyzed in terms of the average incidence of variants per person, "Black Programs" demonstrated the highest average with 5.6 variants per person. (See Table 5). Prime Time and Saturday Morning averaged approximately 4 variants per person, and educational television 1.8. Therefore, "Black Programs" demonstrated the highest per person incidence of variant usage.

A point not to be overlooked, however, is that although "Black Programs" accounted for more than half of the blacks in this sample more whites (51%) appeared on "Black Programs" than did blacks. This was true even though the blacks held regular leading roles. Nevertheless,

of the 587 total variants, black characters, as a group, uniformly averaged more variants per person than any other ethnic group, as indicated in Table 6.

In summary, almost every main character on television used at least one feature of nonstandard English during their speaking opportunities. Males, however, generally used more than three times as many variants as females, leaving females, regardless of their ethnicity, the keepers of the standard form. In addition, the data revealed that black characters used more variants per person than any other ethnic group.

Analysis of variants of nonstandard English in terms of Black English:

Dillard (1972) and others have suggested that 80% of American blacks use Black English. On television, 84% of the black characters used at least one feature of nonstandard English. Whether these variants spoken by black characters, however, were those of Black English is the next question to be addressed.

In general, black characters used few examples of Black English. As cited earlier, the category of nonstandard English most frequently spoken by black characters was the deletion or nonstandard use of the auxiliary verb. Within this category, the most heavily used variant was the omission of "have" with "got." This finding supported a similar report by Fine and Anderson (1980) that this omission accounted for 46% of the examples of auxiliary verb deletion in their study of language used by blacks on television. It should be noted, however, that this omission was not considered an example of Black English. (See Figure 3). Fifty-three percent of the instances of auxiliary verb deletion could be classified as Black English. This classification included examples such as omitting the auxiliary verb in the case of the present

perfect (Dale, 1972), for example, "I never been in this kind of trouble."

The categories of Black English with the next highest frequencies of usage were those of of multiple negatives (e.g., "He don't need no water.") and the use of "ain't." Regarding the rest of the categories relating to Black English, each had limited representation. There were seven examples of alternative forms of tense agreement, two samples of it/there substitution and two instances of the deletion of the possessive "s" (e.g., "Well, Woody eyesight was getting pretty bad.") Of the 14 examples of pleonastic pronouns (e.g., "Jim, he went to the store.") and deletions of the conditional, less than half were spoken by blacks. In addition, "be" deletion, (e.g., "What you talking about?") a distinctive feature of Black English was spoken by 3 times as many whites as blacks. There was no other evidence of Black English except for pronunciation and idioms, which were not a part of this study. Therefore, one could conclude that the grammatical system of Black English was rarely used.

In summary, 25 percent of the variants spoken by blacks could be classified as adhering to the rules of Black English. Most variants spoken by blacks were limited to the categories of auxiliary verbs, use of multiple negatives and the use of "ain't." Even "be" deletion which is considered a distinctive feature of Black English, was spoken by more whites than blacks. In total, 10 categories of Black English were represented in the sample. This is a larger representation than the three main categories of Black English (deletion of auxiliary verb, deletion of copula, and negative concord) found by Fine and Anderson

(1980). Nonetheless, most of the categories were represented by fewer than five variants and most of the examples were spoken by non-blacks.

Distribution of features of nonstandard English among occupational portrayals and character roles:

The results generated by this study may lead one to question the role of nonstandard English on television. Does the language reflect, imply or create any stereotypes of individuals? If so, what stereotypes are being created? In order to deal with these issues, the frequency of variant usage as related to occupational portrayals and character roles was analyzed.

As indicated in Table 7, the occupational categories that accounted for the most frequent use of nonstandard English were the unemployed (speaking 18% of the variants), professionals, such as doctors and entertainers, (speaking 16% of the variants)and law enforcers (speaking 15%). Among the professionals, blacks accounted for more than one-half of the variants. On the average, white professionals spoke 3 variants per person while black professionals averaged 7 variants each. Since all but one black professional appeared on "Black Programs," the high percentage of variants represented by the category of professionals may have been inflated by the comprehensive inclusion of all the "Black Programs."

By analyzing the average use of variants per person, however, new insights came to light. Once more, the unemployed emerged as the heaviest users of nonstandard English with an average of 26 variants per person. Managers averaged 12 variants per person, law enforcers 6 and domestics averaged 4. The groups with the lowest average number of variants per person were assistants (e.g., assistant to the Lieutenant

Governor) and those whose employment was undefined. Most of the latter group appeared on educational television and one-quarter of them lived in apparent affluence.

When the data were analyzed in terms of character roles, comedians, although few in number (N=21), accounted for the highest percentage (34%) of all variants. Seventy-five percent of the domestics were cast in the role of comedians and on the average, comedians used 10 variants per person. As presented in Table 8, victims accounted for the second highest per person usage of variants, with an average of 9 per person. Seventy-five percent of the unemployed and 25% of the managers were portrayed as victims. Heroes, on the other hand, averaged 5 variants per person, with villains accounting for the lowest per person average of 3 variants each. Overall, comedians and victims ranked among those with the highest average incidence of variants per person. Noteably, these two character roles appeared in close relationship with the occupational portrayals that exhibited the highest frequency of variants per person.

Another character trait related to the frequent use of nonstandard English was power assertiveness. Power assertive characters accounted for 29% of the total number of variants. Forty-one percent of the law enforcers and 87% the heroes were portrayed as being power assertive. Of the females, half of all variants spoken by women were spoken by four females. Two were assertive policewomen and two were comedians. Twenty-seven percent of the variants spoken by males were spoken by power assertive males. Therefore, power assertiveness also appeared to be associated with a high frequency usage of nonstandard forms.

In summary, most of the characters exhibiting a high per person incidence of nonstandard English were not only represented by a few of occupations, but also were portrayed in a limited number of character roles. In total, three character roles, the power assertive, the comic and the victim accounted for 73% of all variants heard on the shows in this study. Therefore, the results imply that although certain occupational portrayals appear to be significantly associated with nonstandard English (e.g., the unemployed), character roles may well be the main operant character designation that is predictive of the use of nonstandard English.

Discussion:

Television appeared to present a homogenized version of nonstandard English. Only 3 grammatical classifications of variants accounted for 67% of the 587 examples of Nonstandard usage. Nonstandard English was used in predictable patterns emphasizing specific characterizations, primarily humor, power assertiveness, and victimization, through a heavy reliance on a few nonstandard forms. Fine, Anderson and Eckles (1979, p. 27) arrived at a similar conclusion after studying black situation comedies. "The language heard on these situation comedies seems to be a limited dialect, one that does not correspond to Black English in naturalistic settings, but gives the impression of difference".

The nonstandard English heard on the programs in this sample could not be classified as Black English. Only a few instances of each of the 10 examples of Black English occurred in the speech of 150 characters. In addition, I found the same evidence as Fine, Anderson and Eckles (1979) regarding the use of "be" to mean habituation. This distinguishing feature of Black English was never used by any character.

Finally, the few examples of the rules of Black English were not exclusively used by black characters. By rarely introducing the features of Black English and often having these few examples spoken by people of other ethnic groups besides blacks, Black English was not presented as a language form with ethnic integrity. Instead, it appeared as a high density version of otherwise widely occurring and often stigmatized forms. The nonstandard English heard on television did not seem to reflect any particular dialect accurately. Instead it had the more generic effect of differentiating among those of varying occupational backgrounds and character roles.

With further investigation, some additional peculiarities became evident. Fifty-four percent of all black characters were represented by two characterizations. These were students and professionals. One might have expected that young black teens would be the highest frequency users of nonstandard English as has been found in previous real-life studies (Labov, 1972). But this was not the case. Young black students averaged 4.4 variants per person. This was higher than the same average for white students (2.1 variants per person), but it was not the highest category of variation for black characters. Professionals on the other hand, possibly due to a reflection of their years in school, might have been expected to use a low percentage of variants. Black professionals (e.g., doctors, government officials and entertainers) however, averaged 7 variants per person. This was a very high per person percentage, especially when compared to the white average of 3 for professionals in the same fields of work.

Therefore, one might conclude that nonstandard English on television was also being used to differentiate subtley individuals from the

mainstream. In the situation of white characters, the language was usually paired with visual evidence resulting in the obvious isolation or differentiation of the character. For example, Gary on "Trapper John, M.D.," was white and a heavy user of nonstandard English. However, his language was not the only indication of how he differed from the medical staff that surrounded him. He and his wife lived in an old car and they rummaged through garbage cans for food. His circumstances were as visibly different as his language was variant. For black characters, however, the isolation seems to be more subtle. Although George Jefferson, for example, was portrayed as "moving on up," and being comfortably settled in a plush apartment, the message was clear; he was not a full-fledged member of the white middle class society because of poor business decisions and his frequent use of nonstandard language features. He was portrayed as a buffoon, making constant verbal faux pas.

Black characters were unique in their situation of being visually assimilated while at the same time being differentiated through nondistinct or inappropriate language. No matter what their endeavor, black characters, as a group, neither spoke a dialect that was ethnically strong nor were they fully assimilated into the standard language of the day. Of course, there were exceptions, such as Claire of the "Cosby Show", but these tended to appear infrequently or to be black women who had a record of a low frequency usage of variants. Perhaps here is yet another message about language and social mainstreaming. By rarely using variants and often using none, women in general and black women in particular are differentiated from the norm on the other end of the scale.

The stereotypes set forth by television reinforced those held by the children in the studies of language attitudes (e.g., Day, 1982; Linn and Piche, 1982; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972; and Rosenthal, 1974). The children of those studies freely ascribed personality and other character traits to speakers depending on their use of language. The examples provided by television could easily serve to strengthen the stereotypes that already exist around the speakers of nonstandard English.

If youth, especially boys, think it is "cool" to be tough and power assertive, what might television portrayals suggest regarding language? Many students already have a difficult time in school; if they perceive that nonstandard English is a sign of physical prowess and alter their language patterns accordingly, then they may compound their academic problems. Television may be presenting standards that may contradict those held by teachers and school officials.

Implications for future research abound. Content analyses need to be closely aligned with studies of viewer perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. We have yet to understand the impact of language spoken on television. Future studies might investigate differential effects of language heard on television among young viewers and may define the lines along which these differences may be found. Questions regarding the effects of language differences heard on television in relation to appeal, listening, attention and comprehension may be of interest. Conversely, studies may investigate language differences among viewers in their attention to and comprehension of ordinary televised speech. Additional research is needed to discover how stereotypes are learned, why they are held, and what role is being played by the media in enhancing and stimulating their existence. Future research may extend

this study by asking if the language on television promotes or encourages social stereotypes, and research might address the issues of whether stereotypes are being accepted and transferred to real-life social settings. In addition, research is needed to discover in what ways person perceptions may be altered by the media and whether media-generated changes in perception lead to changes in behavior.

Television is not solely a visual medium. The relationship and interaction between the auditory and visual components may be of significance to our eventual understanding of what children are learning from television and how they are processing and applying that which they learn. Questions regarding the type of language heard on television and the potential for language styles to create or reflect stereotypes of individuals have not yet been fully explored. Until we further analyze the dimensions of language as incorporated on television, we may be denied a full understanding of television's impact on viewer attention, comprehension, perceptions, and perhaps on viewer attitudes and subsequent behaviors.

In conclusion, the young impressionable viewer may receive many messages from television. This study has shown that the use of nonstandard English on television is limited to a few predictable patterns.

1) Nonstandard English is used more frequently by males than by females.

2) Nonstandard English is used more frequently by black characters than by any other ethnic group.

3) Nonstandard English is most widely used by people in a few occupational categories, most noteable by the unemployed.

4) Nonstandard English is frequently used by those who are power assertive or funny.

5) Nonstandard English is frequently used by those who have been innocently victimized by crime or circumstance.

If children apply these associations beyond the medium, to the community, school or home, one can only conjecture as to the potential effects on their interpersonal relationships. Language on television is more than a compilation of spoken words. It is an auditory feature juxtaposed with visuals which give words new dimension through visual context. The understanding of this complex relationship invites future study and suggests a promise for new insights not only into the content of medium but also into the interpretation of its presentations.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1

Percentage Representation of
Sex, Ethnicity, Age, and Occupation on Each Type of Show*

Category	**N=20 Educational Programs	**N=40 Saturday Morning	**N=55 Prime Time Shows	**N=35 "Black Shows"	**N=150 Total Programs
Sex:					
Males	50	80	69	66	69
Females	50	20	31	34	31
Ethnicity:					
Whites	50	52	89	52	65
Blacks	25	15	9	49	22
Hispanics	10	3	2	---	3
Asians	---	3	---	---	1
Nonhuman	15	27	---	---	9
Age:***					
Under 18	25	35	5	20	20
18-65	60	55	95	74	71
Over 65	---	3	---	6	2
Occupations:					
Professionals	---	---	29	26	17
Managers	5	3	3	3	3
Narrators	10	3	---	---	2
Domestics	---	---	2	9	3
Homemakers	---	---	4	14	5
Students	20	38	5	20	19
Royalty	10	10	---	---	5
Law Breakers	---	10	11	6	8
Law Enforcers	5	3	24	6	11
Assistants	---	---	5	3	3
Service	5	---	9	---	4
Employment Undefined	25	5	4	11	8
Unemployed	---	3	4	3	3

* Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
*N = Total number of characters in each type of program.
*** Age was rarely discernable among Nonhumans.

Figure 1

Categories of Nonstandard English

*1. Deletion or nonstandard use auxiliary verb: Typified by three examples (a) the deletion of "have" or "had" when using "got" (b) the omission of "do," and (c) the omission of the helping verb "will."

ex. (a) "Anybody got change for the phone? (Bill, the Scarecrow and Mrs. King).

(b) "Rondu, you know this guy?" (Rob, Mighty Orbots).

(c) "Tomorrow, I get job." (Pappa, Webster).

2. Deletion of subject/object: A sentence having no subject or containing a transitive verb without an object.

ex. "Looks like she has." (Brett, Turbo Teen).

*3. Deletion of verb: A sentence that had no verb, copula or other.

ex. "Me clean." (Animal, The Muppet Babies).

"Bad news for you." (Cannon, Street Hawk).

*4. Verb agreement: A sentence with verbs not consistent in tense or verb(s) not agreeing with the subject(s) in number were categorized by this heading. The lack of subject/verb agreement is listed among the characteristics of Black English (e.g., Burling, 1973).

ex. "Already in ten months, I pay you back $20,000." (Gino, A Team).

"That's what they calls me, Smooth Sam." (Sam, Pryor's Place).

5. Deletion of article: Most frequently delected by foreign speakers, the omission of the article was counted when glaring.

ex. "Thank you for giving me job, Moussake." (Pappa, Webster).

*6. Use of "ain't:"

ex. "You ain't lying there pal." (Sunny, Miami Vice).

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*Categories containing examples of variant usage which conform to the rules of Black English as cited by Burling, 1973; Dale, 1972; Dillard, 1972; Fine, Anderson & Eckles, 1979; and/or Labov, 1972.

Figure 1
Categories of Nonstandard English

7. Omission or nonstandard use of pronoun: Typified by the use of the objective form rather than the subjective form of the pronoun.
   ex. "Hey Louise, what do you say you and me take in the game?" (George, Jeffersons).

*8. Multiple negatives: Sentences that used two or more consecutive negatives in the auxiliary and/or indefinite positions. Often cited as being included in Black English (e.g., Burling, 1973; Labov, 1975).
   ex. "You don't need no water, you need a priest. (Florence, Jeffersons).

9. Nonstandard use of adjectives and/or adverbs: Most often an adjective was used in an instance where an adverb was demanded.
   ex. "You don't give up easy, do you?" (Mayor, Benson).

10. Word order: Sentences with words in unusual order.
   ex. "You forget that one time three o'clock in the morning, in that very bed I was, and a woman called." (Cliff, Cosby Show).

11. Replacement or omission of preposition: A preposition that was used either in a nonstandard manner or was left out entirely.
   ex. "But you know, (for) a man in your position, a body guard acts as a deterrent." (Colt, Fall Guy).

*12. Deletion of the conditional: Often occurred in the beginning of a sentence. Cited as occurring in particular situations in Black English. (e.g., Dillard, 1972, pp. 63-65; Labov, 1975, p. 46).
   ex. "I'm not up on every case, Craig will have my butt." (Erlick, St. Elsewhere).

*13. Pleonastic pronouns: Black English often uses a redundant subject construction (Fine, Anderson and Eckles, 1979, p. 25).
   ex. "Me and you, we'll go dribbling that thing to the store ourselves, together." (Bummer, Pryor's Place).

*14. Extra words: Words that are grammatically unnecessary and could have been left out.
   ex. "Somebody went and tied me up." (Damsel, Electric Co.).

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*Categories containing examples of variant usage which conform to the rules of Black English as cited by Burling, 1973; Dale, 1972; Dillard, 1972; Fine, Anderson & Eckles, 1979; and/or Labov, 1972.

Figure 1
Categories of Nonstandard English

15. Run-on sentence: Consisted of two or more sentences separated by no pause or indication of punctuation.
    ex. "They were 10 minutes from the hospital and I jumped up, showered, shaved, put my three piece suit on, was standing in the admitting room having read a book that I bought in the gift shop." (Cliff, Cosby Show).

*16. It/there substitution: A variant particular to Black English where the word "it" is used instead of the word "there." (Burling, 1973, p. 53 and Labov, 1975, p. 27)
    ex. "It was nothing like it." (Art, Facts of Life).

*17. Deletion of the possessive "s": A variant that is cited as belonging to Black English (e.g., Burling, 1973; Labov, 1975, p. 41).
    ex. "Well, Woody eyesight was getting pretty bad." (Mr. T., Mr. T.).

18. Deletion of tag: Although extremely rare, once the question formation called for a tag, due to the lack inversion of the subject and verb, and it was omitted.
    ex. "Why, you don't think she's going with another car?" (Alex, Turbo Teen).

19. Deletion of the conjunction: A rare occurrence, spoken by a foreigner. (Classified according to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 1221).
    ex. "Nobody cares Papp can fix anything, any time." (Pappa, Webster).

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*Categories containing examples of variant usage which conform to the rules of Black English as cited by Burling, 1973; Dale, 1972; Dillard, 1972; Fine, Anderson & Eckles, 1979; and/or Labov, 1972.

Figure 2

GRAMMAR VARIATION
Coding System
(applies to all variation tables)
(N = total number of uses)

1 = deletion or nonstandard use of auxiliary verb (N=199)	2 = deletion of subject/object (N=133)	3 = deletion of verb (N=64)	4 = verb agreement verb/verb subject/verb (N=43)
5 = deletion of article (N=28)	6 = use of ain't (N=21)	7 = omission or nonstandard use of pronoun (N=20)	8 = multiple negatives (N=19)
9 = adjective/ adverb usage (N=11)	10 = word order (N=10)	11 = replacement or omission of preposition (N=10)	12 = pleonastic pronouns (N=7)
13= deletion of conditional (N=6)	14 = extra words (N=5)	15 = run-on sentence (N=3)	16 = it/there substitution (N=2)
17= deletion of possessive "s" (N=2)	18 = deletion of tag (N=2)	19 = deletion of conjunction (N=2)	

TABLE 2

Frequency of Grammar Variations by Television Show

BLACK SHOWS

																				TOTAL
Cosby	4	3	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	16
Jeffersons	13	1	1	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	22
Miami Vice	8	7	3	2	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	27
Gimme a Break	9	6	3	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	24
Benson	10	4	4	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
Differ't Strokes	9	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14
Webster	18	7	4	11	16	0	3	1	3	4	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	72
																				197
GRAMMAR VARIATIONS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	

1 = deletion or nonstandard use of auxiliary verb

2 = deletion of subject/object

3 = deletion of verb

4 = verb agreement verb/verb subject/verb

5 = deletion of article

6 = use of ain't

7 = omission or nonstandard use of pronoun

8 = multiple negatives

9 = adjective/adverb usage

10 = word order

11 = replacement or omission of preposition

12 = pleonastic pronouns

13= deletion of conditional

14 = extra words

15 = run-on sentence

16 = it/there substitution

17= deletion of possessive "s"

18 = deletion of tag

19 = deletion of conjunction

TABLE 3

Frequency of Grammar Variations by Television Show

PRIME TIME

																				TOTAL
Scarecrow/ King	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
A Team	11	2	2	15	2	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	38
Facts of Life	14	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	23
St. Elsewhere	5	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	12
Crazy like a Fox	8	7	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Murder She Wrote	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Magnum PI	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Fall Guy	2	7	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Trapper John, MD	10	3	2	1	0	8	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29
Cagney & Lacey	25	9	6	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	49
Street Hawk	9	9	2	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	28
																				228
GRAMMAR VARIATIONS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	

TABLE 4

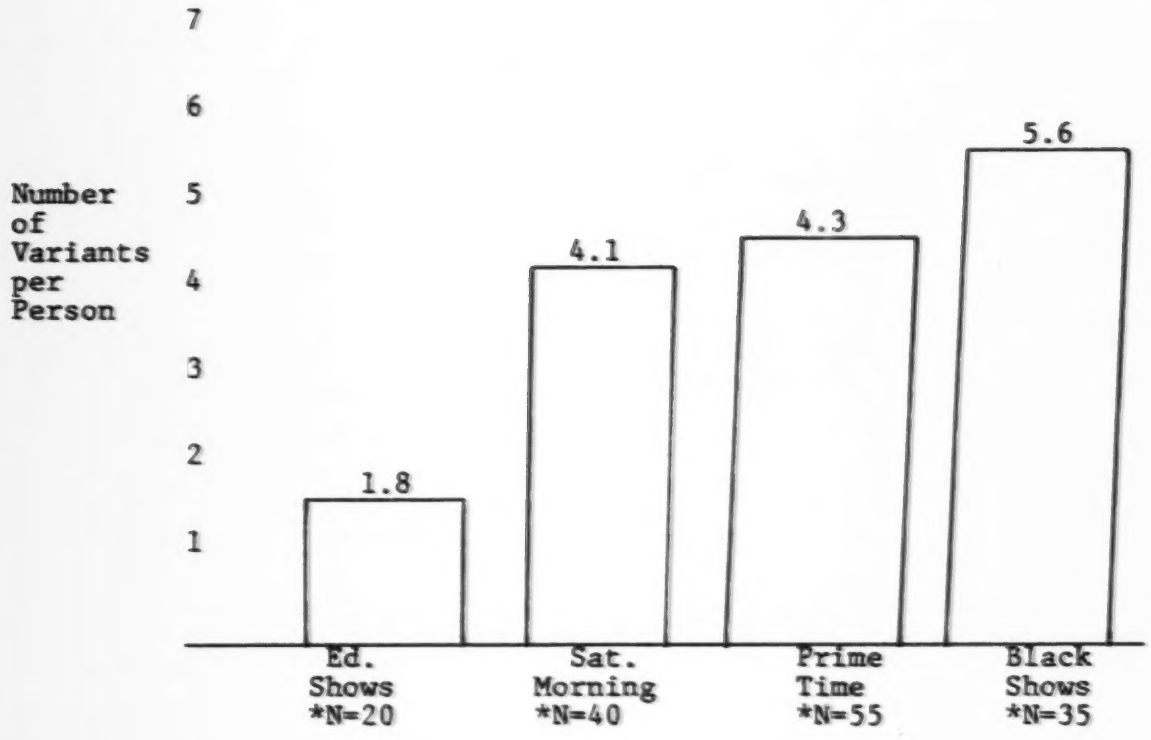
Frequency of Grammar Variations by Television Show

SATURDAY MORNING AND EDUCATIONAL SHOWS

																				TOTAL
SATURDAY MORNING:																				
Mr. T	8	7	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	21
Mighty Orbots	3	7	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Muppet Babies	3	4	4	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
Dragon's Lair	2	4	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Dungeon's and Dragon	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Kid Video	2	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Turbo Teen	6	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	17
Pryor's Place	10	4	0	2	0	5	3	6	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	36
																				127
Educational:																				
Electric Co.	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
3-2-1 Contact	2	7	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
Sesame St.	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Mr. Rogers	0	6	4	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
																				36
GRAMMAR VARIATIONS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	

TABLE 5

Average Incident of Variants Per Person
by Show Type



*N = Total number of characters in each show category.

TABLE 6

Percent of Nonstandard English Usage by Ethnicity and Sex*

Category	*Nc=150 Percent of Total Characters	*Nv=587 Percent of Total Variants	Average Number of Variants Per Person
Sex:			
MALE	69	78	5
FEMALE	31	22	3
Ethnicity:			
BLACK	22	31	6
CAUCASION	65	61	4
HISPANIC	3	3	4
ASIAN	1	0	0
NATIVE AMERICAN	0	0	0

* Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and the exclusion of nonhumans.

*Nc = Total number of characters.

*Nv = Total number of variants of Nonstandard English

**Averages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Figure 3

Most Common Syntactic Features
of Black English
(Fine, Anderson and Eckles
1979, p. 25)

1. "Deletion of the past tense marker of the verb, e.g., 'passes' = 'pass.'

2. Deletion of the -s suffix for the third person present tense, e.g., 'he run home' = 'he runs home.'

3. Deletion of the auxiliary verb, e.g., 'you hear' = 'do you hear.'

4. Deletion of the copula, e.g., 'you tired' = you are tired.'

5. Use of 'be' to mean habituation, e.g., 'he be workin'.

6. Negative concord, e.g., 'don't nobody know' = 'nobody knows.'

7. Plural subjects with singular form of 'be', e.g., 'they is.'

8. Deletion of the -s suffix marking the possessive, e.g., "John book' = "John's book.'

9. Deletion of the -s suffix marking the plural, e.g., 'whole lotta song.'

10. Use of a pleonastic noun, e.g., 'John, he live in New York.'"

Labov (1975) had discussed all the above but also had included the following:

"The Negro vernacular uses dummy it for there, saying it's a difference; it's no one there; it's a policeman at the door; but despite their long contact with Negro speakers in person and in dialect literature, the neighboring white speakers know nothing of this pattern." (Labov, 1975, p. 27).

"We find in nonstandard Negro English such forms as Didn't nobody see it, Didn't nobody hear it. These appear to be question forms used as declaratives, which would be a radical difference from standard English. But closer investigation shows that this is merely an extension of the

Figure 3
Features of Black English

standard rule of literary English which gives us Never did he see it, Nor did anybody see it: the negative is placed at the beginning of the sentence along with the first member of the verb phrase which contains the tense marker. This inversion of the tense marker and the subject shows the same order as in questions, but it does not indicate a question with Never did he see it anymore than with Didn't nobody see it." (Labov, 1975, p. 40).

"Nonstandard Negro English uses the system for embedded questions which prevail in the casual speech of most southern dialects: the subject and auxiliary preserve the inverted order of the direct question and no complementizer is used. Thus northern I asked him if he could go corresponds to southern I asked him could he go." (Labov, 1975, p. 46).

"...For many nonstandard speakers, both black and white, contractions with 'not' frequently result in the famous 'ain't.'... It is more often black speakers who also contract 'did not' to 'ain't:' I ain't get but a little bit." (Burling, 1973, p. 70).

TABLE 7

Occupational Categories

Distribution of Characters and their Use of Nonstandard English

Category	*Nc=150 Percent of Total Characters	*Nv=587 Percent of Total Variants	Average Number of Variants Per Person
Unemployed	3	18	26
Managers	3	8	12
Law Enforcers	11	15	6
Law Breakers	8	9	5
Professionals	17	16	4
Domestics	3	3	4
Homemakers	5	3	3
Students	19	13	3
Narrators	2	1	3
Royalty	5	2	2
Service	5	3	2
Assistants	3	1	1
Undefined	8	2	1

*Nc = Total number of characters.
*Nv = Total number of variants of Nonstandard English
* Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding and the exclusion of nonhumans.

TABLE 8

Character Roles

Distribution of Characters and their Use of Nonstandard English

Category	*Nc=150 Percent of Total Characters	*Nv=587 Percent of Total Variants	Average Number of Variants Per Person
Comedians*	14	34	10
Victims*	10	22	9
Heroes	10	14	5
Villains	11	8	3

*Nc = Total number of characters.

*Nv = Total number of variants of Nonstandard English

* = One character, Pappa on "Webster," functioned as both a comedian and a victim according to the working definitions used in this study. Therefore, he is included in both categories.